

# Evasive countermeasures: Boko Haram's influence operations in the Lake Chad Basin region

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## Abstract

Since its emergence, the insurgency group, Boko Haram has continued to wreak havoc on local communities in Northeast Nigeria and across the Lake Chad Basin region together with its offshoot, the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP). This has led to the death of several people and the displacement of many others. While affected states in the troubled region have mostly responded through kinetic operations, the activities of both groups have continued unabated. These activities have mostly been achieved via attempts to exert influence in communities with little or minimal state authority. Previous studies have focused on the origins, causes, attacks, and consequences of the activities of the violent extremist group, yet its influence operations particularly in contested territories remain under-examined. This qualitative study foregrounds the need to close this gap using descriptive analysis. Countering Boko Haram and ISWAP's influence operations in the Lake Chad Basin region remains the key to winning the "soft" war which is necessary to ultimately degrade, dismantle, and defeat these insurgency groups in the region.

**Keywords:** Boko Haram, ISWAP, Influence operations, Nigeria, Lake Chad Basin region

## Introduction

The activities of Boko Haram, known in Arabic as *Jamā'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihād* (JAS) (BBC, 2021) and its breakaway faction, the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) have claimed the lives of over 350,000 people according to the United Nations Development Programme, from the inception of the insurgency in 2009 to 2021 (UNDP, 2021). This is in addition to displacing over 2.1 million people in Nigeria's Northeast region as of 2021 according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2022). Boko Haram's activities have remained unabated, as it continues to devastate local communities across Nigeria's Northeast and the Lake Chad Basin regions.

One of the reasons for the continued struggle between the Boko Haram jihadist group and security forces has been the over-prioritisation of military operations which unintendedly contributes to the group's evolution overtime (Weeraratne, 2017, Obamamoye, 2017); as opposed to non-military operations, such as discrediting Boko Haram's influence in local communities. Despite the use of force against the Boko Haram insurgency, its

activities have continued without stop across the Lake Chad Basin regions over the years (Sampson, 2016). The areas mostly affected by the activities of the group continue to struggle with high levels of poverty, high rates of illiteracy, unemployment, inequality, weak institutions, poor governance, and environmental degradation to mention a few. Boko Haram and ISWAP have taken advantage of minimal state presence in most affected communities to engage in providing certain social services aimed at winning the 'hearts and minds' of the locals in these communities. This strategy repeatedly adopted and utilised by jihadist groups, including Boko Haram and ISWAP, is referred to as 'influence operations' in analytical terms.

As a distinct contribution to knowledge, this study focuses on providing analytical insights on how 'influence operations' can be disrupted, drawing on evidence from available secondary sources. The study draws attention to the influence operations adopted by Boko Haram, and identifies ways in which the approaches adopted by the Nigerian armed forces, mostly around championing community-related interventions can be further strengthened through efforts to counter Boko Haram's influence.

The study adopts descriptive and qualitative designs complemented by other relevant qualitative research methods, including content analysis, textual criticism, and structural phenomenology. It uses secondary sources of data, including books, journals, official reports, and reliable local and international media reportage. Content analysis is beneficial to the study for sorting, ranking, and making meaning out of relevant aspects of the data. Similarly, textual criticism as used in the study helps to ensure that crucial and hidden details are highlighted by reading between the lines of the reports consulted. Additionally, structural phenomenology helps in providing contextual meaning to the sources of data utilised and examining how these sources contribute to shaping and informing the general narrative and research objectives of the current study.

The paper is divided into 5 sections. The introduction is followed by the methodology, and conceptual and theoretical framework sections. The next section after these, is on Boko Haram and its affiliate group ISWAP, after which the paper delves into the influence operations of Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin region. This is then followed by the section highlighting the need for a new

approach to countering Boko Haram's influence, and the concluding section.

The central argument of this study is that until the Nigerian military's interventions in the Boko Haram insurgency involve a deliberate attempt at integrating the affected local communities in the decision-making process on all matters relating to their peace and security, attempts towards the effective disruption of Boko Haram's influence operations in the affected local communities would be an effort in futility.

### **Counterinsurgency and influence operations – A conceptual framework**

#### *Counterinsurgency*

By way of definition, an insurgency refers to a form of rebellion instigated by a dissident group and directed at the government of a state, through several means such as sabotage, terrorism, guerrilla warfare and civil disobedience, with the goal of overthrowing it with the support of a significant portion of the population (Galula, 2006; Afzal, 2021). Insurgency groups therefore adopt subversive means towards the attainment of their goals and objectives (Manu, 2021). These groups pursue the attainment of their political objectives mostly through the use of unconventional means (Metz & Millen, 2004).

Counterinsurgency refers to efforts aimed at addressing the activities of insurgent groups. This usually involves the use of soft approaches (Shettima, 2021); unlike counterterrorism, which focuses on the use of hard approaches against insurgency groups. While there are several forms of insurgencies all across the world (Merari, 1993), they are mostly differentiated by the degree of violence they exhibit towards their targets.

Insurgencies are also caused by several factors most of which can be categorised as economic, ethnic, or religious, directed at the state or its political leaders (Jones & Johnston, 2013).

Counterinsurgency efforts, therefore, involve the use of a comprehensive set of political, economic, social and security approaches with the goal of eliminating and preventing the occurrence of armed violence resulting from insurgencies through the creation and maintenance of stable political, economic, and social structures (Scotts, 2007). Achieving this entails winning over the hearts and minds of the local populations which insurgency groups rely on (Thomas, 2016).

#### *Influence operations*

The influence yielded by insurgency groups the world over remains an understudied area in terrorism studies

(Waldmann, 2008). Insurgency groups are known to leverage the support of local communities in perpetuating their nefarious activities. This support usually comes in the form of feelings or expressions of sympathy. Yet these forms of support accorded to insurgency groups are distinct as being mostly reflected through a demonstration of sympathy and acts of support respectively (Christopher, 2010).

While influence operations as a concept has been defined in different ways, Larson et al. (2009) contend that it entails influencing a target audience which includes an individual leader, members of a decision-making group, military organisations and their personnel, specific population sub-groups as well as mass publics. Bergh (2020) defines influence operations as the concerted effort by an actor, whether a state or non-state actor to interfere in the process of meaning-making by individuals or groups which are outside its legal control, through the utility of tools and facilities on publicly available social media services. This definition clearly points to one of the means and channels by which such groups as Boko Haram and ISWAP exert their influence.

As the power and influence of insurgency groups increase, the tendency for them to

be resisted becomes significantly reduced (Silke, 2007). They can achieve this by providing some forms of social services intended at winning the hearts and minds of the local population with the desired effect of undermining the authority of the state (Asal et al., 2022). These activities are mostly provided within territories under the direct control of the insurgency groups, thereby offering insights into understanding the actions and ambitions of such groups (Pinos & Radil, 2020).

### **State fragility – Theoretical discourse**

Terrorism is known to mostly thrive in fragile settings. This reality offers a starting point for understanding the complexities associated with terrorism. It is also imperative to note that there have been several attempts made at describing these realities, which has resulted in the use of such terminologies as state weakness, state failure, and state collapse. However, for analytical purposes, this paper adopts state fragility as its theoretical framework. While state fragility is associated with a condition of state failure, it is not the same thing as state failure. State failure has been defined by Zartman (1995), as a situation that reflects the non-functionality of the state's basic functions. Similarly, Carmet (2003), describes state failure as a non-

linear process of relative decay. While this has been the case in some countries across the world, it is significant to note that a more extreme reflection of the non-functionality of the state's basic functions is understood to be a condition of state collapse (Rotberg, 2002). For a state to be described as collapsed implies that it has mostly lost its legitimacy and power, which includes losing its ability to guarantee the safety and security of its citizens (Hanna & Besada, 2007). One of the most fundamental responsibilities of a state is to ensure the safety and security of its citizens as enshrined in its constitution. But where it lacks the legitimacy to do so or the ability to do so, it qualifies as a failed state (Saha & Mallavarapu, 2006). As Nay (2013) rightly contends, failed states are therefore characterised by dramatically declining, weak or broken conditions of legitimacy, authority and capacity.

It is pertinent to note that most failed states bear the hallmarks of deteriorating socio-economic conditions which are reflected through high poverty levels among others, thereby contributing towards their conflict-prone nature. Very often, reversing this requires significant improvements in the quality of governance (Brinkernhoff, 2011). The linkages between state fragility and the

state's inability to address conflict for instance, without the use of force is reflective of its lack of capacity in this regard (Ikpe, 2007; Lenshie et al., 2022).

Fragile states therefore serve as safe havens for insurgency groups to thrive. Among other reasons, insurgency groups take advantage of the deteriorating situation in fragile states which often push vulnerable citizens to the edge, by trying to fill existing gaps owing to the state's incapacity. In addition to these, they also leverage local grievances which are commonplace in such states to shore up their recruitment drive by promising alternatives through their cause.

Further, the continued existence of worsening conditions which characterise fragile states offers the basis for which insurgency groups such as Boko Haram and ISWAP seek to exert their influence on local populations. Especially local populations which are vulnerable and have little or no state presence within them. Such localities have been described in the literature as ungoverned spaces (Ojo, 2020). However, given that this concept has been repeatedly challenged, a more useful terminology would be, alternatively governed spaces or contested spaces.

## **Boko Haram/ISWAP in the Lake Chad Basin Region**

The origins of Boko Haram can be traced back to the year 2002, in a camp located in Kanama, Yobe state, in Northeast Nigeria (Zenn, 2020). This period also marks the time when the group first began as a low-intensity politically violent group (Omenma et al., 2020). After this, the group then transformed into a social movement and an aspirational jihadist group between the period of 2002–2009, and a full-fledged insurgency organisation from the year 2009 onwards (Nwankpa, 2020). With the death of its leader Muhammed Yusuf while in police custody in 2009, his protégé Abubakar Shekau, took on the reins of leadership. The most affected states by the atrocities of Boko Haram in Nigeria are Borno, Adamawa and Yobe which are in the Northeast region. Other neighbouring states in the Lake Chad Basin region which are also severely affected by the activities of the insurgency group include Cameroun, Chad, and Niger. While the group has engaged in several nefarious activities which include kidnapping for ransom, mass killings, suicide bombings, and sexual violence such as rape, among others, it gained international notoriety

after it abducted over 200 girls in 2013, from their school, in Chibok, Borno state, Nigeria (Abubakar, 2014). The group is believed to have kidnapped over 2,000 women and girls most of whom it uses as sexual slaves, recruiters and fighters as well as for intelligence gathering (Hansen, 2015; Nwangwu et al., 2021).

Notably, the insurgency group has been responsible for attacks on government institutions as well. Some of the weapons used by the group include mortars, Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), and Vehicle Borne Improvised Devices (VBIEDs), among others. It is also pertinent to note that the group is driven by a political ideology which is intended for the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate in Nigeria, ruled by Sharia Law (USIP, 2012). The use of the above weapons has resulted in significant casualties in civilian populations across the Lake Chad Basin countries as well as within the military forces fighting these insurgency groups. The insurgency groups have continued to evolve over the years both in terms of their tactics as well as their operations.

Following the rise of the Islamic State and its quest for expansion into Africa, Shekau pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in 2015 (BBC, 2015). This allegiance

resulted in Boko Haram's name being changed from *Jamā'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihād* (JASJ) which was adopted as the name of the group under Shekau's leadership in 2010, to Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP). A new leader in the person of Abu Musab was appointed by the Islamic State. A move which resulted in Shekau and his loyalists leaving ISWAP, while maintaining his leadership of JASJ (Zenn, 2020). Subsequently, a clash between ISWAP and JASJ resulted in the death of Shekau in May 2021. However, it is pertinent to note that this is not intended at providing a thorough presentation of the events leading to the split, which is much more than what is explored in this study. As a response to the threat posed by Boko Haram and ISWAP in the Lake Chad Basin region, the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) has continued to carry out several military operations with the goal of degrading, dismantling, and destroying the group (International Crisis Group, 2020). As part of its nefarious activities in the Lake Chad Basin region, JASJ was responsible for the death of about 100 soldiers and the injury of 50 others (ICG, 2020).

It is pertinent to note that beyond kinetic approaches, it has been argued that defeating Boko Haram requires soft

approaches (Ugwueze & Onuoha, 2020); hence, the basis for the need to discredit the group through approaches intended to render its activities less attractive (Korteweg, 2008). This is particularly important, considering the fact that over-militaristic approaches to addressing terrorism have had the unintended consequence of contributing to the protractedness of the conflict.

### **Boko Haram's Influence in the Lake Chad Basin Region**

Both Boko Haram and ISWAP continue to enjoy a degree of support from local communities in some parts of Northeast Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin region. An important distinction to make however, is that, while ISWAP has been able to establish cordial relationships with some people because of its liberal and soft policy for the Muslim communities, which are more in population around the Lake Chad region, it has been very hard for Boko Haram to continue to hold sway owing to its hardline approach. Both insurgency groups have mostly taken advantage of local challenges such as socio-economic challenges, high illiteracy, and high unemployment rates, among others (Piazza, 2011; Stewart, 2002; Ayegba, 2015; Onuoha, 2015). Other factors which the insurgency groups continue to

leverage include weak state institutions, political marginalisation, poor governance, and environmental-related issues (Jackson, 2001; Dowd & Drury, 2017; Hergre & Nygard, 2015; UNDP, 2016).

In the case of ISWAP, it has specifically sought to consolidate its territorial gains, including reinforcing its recruitment drive, in affected local communities by providing money to children, distributing charitable goods to civilians, as well as preaching to elders and the youth. It also conducts the collection of zakat from locals (Daily Trust, 2021), which is intended at legitimising its hold over contested territories. In May 2021, the group had raised about 51.9 million Naira (over \$92,000 USD) and distributed about 3.4million to the poor during Ramadan (Samuel, 2022). The implications of these 'influence operations' are that Boko Haram and ISWAP can significantly increase the number of their fighters through recruitment from local communities. While the exact number of fighters in both groups is difficult to ascertain, the number of ISWAP fighters is at least twice that of Boko Haram (Warner & Hulme, 2018). This goes to show that while both groups remain rivals, they adopt similar tactics aimed at winning hearts and minds.



Among the most pertinent questions that have remained in the minds of analysts, and observers alike are, why has the groups' successful implementation of these 'influence operations' lasted for so long, and how can the operations be effectively disrupted? It is pertinent to note that disrupting Boko Haram's influence operations, and those of its breakaway faction, ISWAP is crucial to crippling the jihadist groups by making it increasingly difficult for them to recruit foot soldiers (International Crisis Group, 2019), which is central to their ability to wage asymmetric warfare. Like Boko Haram which seeks to create an Islamic Caliphate, ISWAP's long-term objective remains the establishment of an Islamic State. The strategic use of influence by both groups in the pursuit of these objectives has intensified over the years. To effectively disrupt their 'influence operations', one must first understand the underlying motive of the groups, that is, to create an Islamic State (BBC, 2016) and the conditions that led to their emergence in the first instance.

It is significant at this juncture to point out that ISWAP operates from within the Lake Chad Basin while Boko Haram operates from the Sambisa Forest. Though rivals, both Boko Haram and ISWAP have since continued their reign of terror

against the Nigerian state and its neighbours in the Lake Chad Basin area. It has also combined the use of guerrilla tactics with coordinated efforts within their spheres of influence to win the hearts and minds of locals. Some of the locals have gone ahead to join them and to serve as informants – which is part of the broader goals of their 'influence operations'.

Within some of the affected local communities for instance, the Nigerian military has embarked on the creation of boreholes, the construction of clinics and the building of schools, in addition to the renovation of some worship centres. Doing so as part of the strategies to counter the influence of the jihadi groups, has been an attempt at putting a 'human face' to the war against the Boko Haram insurgency. Another significant strategy at countering the influence of these groups, particularly targeted at former Boko Haram fighters, has been the Operation Safe Corridor launched in 2016, which is aimed at disarming, demobilising, rehabilitating, and reintegrating former fighters of the group. The programme has however, come under criticism for lacking a gendered perspective, as it targets only male Boko Haram ex-fighters.

Despite the death of the leaders of the two groups, Boko Haram's Abubakar Shekau and ISWAP's Abu Musab Al-Barnawi, the son of the former leader of Boko Haram, Muhammed Yusuf, in 2021, the influence operations of these insurgency groups have largely gone unabated. Shortly after Al-Barnawi's death, ISWAP announced a new leader, known as Sani Shuwaram, making him the fifth leader in the group's line of successors. Others have included Mamman Nur, Abba-Gana, Abu-Dawud, and Abu Musab Al-Barnawi.

Beyond the use of guerrilla tactics which have defined their *modus operandi* and characterised the evolving nature of the asymmetric warfare within their theatres of operation, both Boko Haram and ISWAP have increasingly prioritised non-military tactics. Some of the ways the insurgent groups have executed their influence operations over the years bear the hallmarks of a well-planned, coordinated, and sophisticated approach, intended to have optimal results. These 'influence operations' have had the tendency to continually prolong the war against these groups, as it has served to attract new recruits, including informants who in some cases voluntarily join their fold, thereby expanding their spheres of influence. For instance, ISWAP has

tactically used local preachers in its recruitment drive; they also use them to encourage internally displaced persons to return to their communities. This ensures that the increased influx of IDPs into these devastated communities will not only guarantee the consolidation of the group's control but also stimulate economic activities that could serve as a source of revenue generation for them. This of course, is besides the huge revenue being made from kidnappings for ransom.

A careful observation of the 'influence operations' of these insurgency groups further reveals that they rely on exploiting local grievances directed at the state while also meticulously attempting to fill in the vacuums created by the lack of adequate government presence, in the affected regions. For instance, ISWAP differs from the main Boko Haram group, in that, it as a matter of conduct, does not target civilians. This is also in addition to its position of not using girls as suicide bombers. The splinter group is also generally more open to dialogue with the Nigerian authorities. This distinction is important as it demonstrates the difference in tactics adopted by both groups towards achieving the same goal.

In addition to this, the group's 'influence operations' aimed at winning the 'hearts and minds' of locals include administering taxation, digging wells in parts of the affected local communities, providing seeds and fertilisers to farmers and even facilitating the safe pasture of herders. This in return has led to trust-building and cooperation between the group and the local communities. Boko Haram's splinter group, ISWAP is also known to give out motorcycles as incentives to potential recruits. The effects of these influence operations have led to the perception of the group as being able to offer some form of socio-economic relief amidst lingering hardships (Samuel, 2019).

As far back as 2015, Boko Haram had encouraged local communities in the Lake Chad Basin area to continue fishing while setting up levies and securing routes for local fish traders who needed to get their goods to designated markets. Similarly, another product, red pepper, also known in the region as 'red gold' which has been of strategic importance to ISWAP caused the group to send emissaries to various IDPs camps in Borno state to request that they return to farms, fishing, and trading activities; in exchange, the group is known to provide them with security. This approach

underscores the group's sophistication in the use of economic diplomacy as a part of its broader 'influence operations'. Beyond making millions of Naira from the fishing and red pepper businesses, the insurgents are also known to levy taxes on livestock farmers and herders within the Lake Chad Basin area, through a scheme known as *Hadaya*, according to locals in the region. The above influence operation is underpinned by the socio-economic challenges confronting the local communities, which has also invariably left them at the mercy of the jihadi groups, who claim to provide them with an alternative way out.

In more recent times, ISWAP fighters have extended their 'influence operations' within local communities to include providing money to children, giving charitable goods to civilians, as well as preaching to elders and the youth, during Ramadan, which is the period designated by Muslims for fasting. Further, it is known to provide some forms of arbitration, aimed at settling local disputes within the region through its *Hisbah*, thereby administering local governance services. The group is also known to provide basic medical services in some instances and security services to traders stretching from the Kusiri market in Northern Cameroun to the Kinchandi

market in Niger. Both ISWAP and the Bakura-led sub-group of Boko Haram operating from within the Lake Chad Basin region benefit tremendously from these 'influence operations.'

As part of its extensive 'influence operations', ISWAP is also known to have distributed pamphlets depicting the Nigerian army as the enemy. This is for allegedly chasing them out of their homes, while calling on these locals not to support the army, across local communities under its sphere of influence in the Northeast Nigeria's Borno state.

Disrupting Boko Haram's 'influence operations' as well as those of ISWAP is crucial to crippling these groups thereby making it increasingly difficult for them to recruit foot soldiers which are invariably central to their ability to wage asymmetric warfare. More specifically, for this to work, the process must entail integrating the locals into decision-making on all matters pertaining to peace and security.

### **Countering Boko Haram/ISWAP's influence**

Over the years, the Nigerian state has responded to the rise of the insurgency perpetuated by Boko Haram and ISWAP

through the use of kinetic countermeasures to curtail the spread of their influence and discredit them through campaigns aimed at achieving such objectives. One of these was using the death of Abu Musab al-Barnawi (BBC, 2021), the former leader of ISWAP. Nigeria's counterinsurgency efforts have mostly reflected a combination of both kinetic and non-kinetic approaches. Several military campaigns which include ground assaults, and air bombardments have been launched against the group and its breakaway factions within Nigeria and parts of the Lake Chad Basin region. In 2013, the Nigerian state began to deploy Special Operations forces, who have contributed significantly to gaining back lost territories which were once under Boko Haram's control. One of the Nigerian army's longest military campaigns against the insurgency, codenamed Operation Lafiya Dole, was in 2021 renamed as Operation Hadi Kai, to better reflect the joint efforts of the various arms of the military. Other military campaigns embarked upon by the Nigerian military in the region, particularly in more recent times include 'Operation Deep Punch' and 'Operation Tura Takai Bango'. Others conducted by the region's Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) include, 'Operation Yancin

Tafki' and 'Operation Gama Aiki'. The extent to which these kinetic efforts have been able to degrade, dismantle and defeat Boko Haram remains contested. The MNJTF was established by member-states in the region which include Cameroun, Chad, Niger and Nigeria (ICG, 2020). While Benin Republic is not a part of the Lake Chad Basin region, it remains a part of the MNJTF. The force has a strength of about 8,000 troops and is supported by the European Union and the African Union, in addition to being overseen by the Lake Chad Basin Commission (ICG, 2020).

It is significant to note that some of the root causes of the insurgency which have remained prevalent and gone unaddressed have helped to continually fuel the spread of its extremist ideology across local communities in Nigeria and beyond, and allow the jihadi groups to gain more influence. Some of these root causes are underpinned by socio-economic, political and environmental factors such as high unemployment rates, high economic inequality, high poverty rates, high illiteracy rates, poor governance, and desertification to mention a few, which have remained prevalent across the affected regions. These challenges require a different kind of approach towards addressing them.

As part of the efforts to counter the jihadi groups' influence, the Nigerian state, through the Nigerian military, has attempted to win the 'hearts and minds' of the affected local people through the use of non-kinetic approaches, which are often referred to as civil-military cooperation activities.

Countering the influence of the insurgent groups effectively requires a different approach to counterinsurgency strategy beyond traditional 'civil-military relations' to a 'citizens-centric governance'. Citizens-centric governance entails a deliberate attempt at integrating the affected local communities in decision-making process on all matters relating to their peace and security. The purpose of this new approach is to place emphasis on entrenching a process that is people-centred. This would involve providing the means for local communities to be able to take part in improving the governance process that would help to ensure their direct involvement on matters that concern them.

This approach is predicated on building resilience through citizen participation and inclusivity in the governance of peace process which is key to discrediting the insurgency groups and exposing their

exploitative misinterpretation of Islam, from which they draw their influence. Doing this through effective local governance that prioritises citizens' participation and inclusivity, has the potential of stoking distrust against Boko Haram and making it more difficult for it to attract voluntary recruits, yet helping to build resilience in the affected local communities.

For instance, the establishment of local community councils with representatives from within the community and their involvement in the planning and execution of efforts aimed at reconstructing previously devastated communities would go a long way in bringing the government closer to the affected communities. Also ensuring that the voices of all, including those of the minorities in the affected local communities are heard is paramount to improving state-society relations. Deliberate efforts aimed at exposing the atrocities of these groups such as the use of child fighters, sexual abuse including raping both males and females in captivity, would go a long way in getting local communities to see these insurgency groups for what they really are. This is crucial to countering their influence across the local communities. Exposing Daesh's sexual exploitation of

abducted boys (Ochab, 2021) for instance, was crucial to waging an information war that discredited its influence in Iraq.

The governments in the affected regions also need to work closely with local faith-based organisations (FBOs) such as Muslims and their leaders in promulgating the true teachings of Islam, which calls for peaceful co-existence, as a counter-narrative to the misleading teachings and preaching of the insurgent groups.

These non-kinetic approaches, which has been a missing link in efforts aimed at weakening the influence of the insurgency groups, is key to discrediting them and subsequently degrading, dismantling, and defeating them (Campbell and Weitz, n.d). Until this is done, there can be no meaningful progress in the war to win the 'hearts and minds' of local community dwellers. The stakes, particularly in terms of human lives are too high so settle for anything less.

## Conclusion

While the ongoing military efforts aimed at defeating Boko Haram have yielded some results, they have not completely succeeded in bringing an end to the

insurgency group. These efforts fall short of prioritising the need to address the spread of the group's influence. One reason for the unsuccessfulness of military approach is that it has had the unintended consequence of contributing to the protractedness of the conflict in the affected region. As Boko Haram have continued to wreak havoc on lives and livelihoods across the troubled Lake Chad Basin region, there is an increased need to recognise the importance of non-military approaches. To effectively defeat Boko Haram and ISWAP would entail deliberate efforts at disrupting their influence operations thereby rendering

their ability to curate support and sympathy from local populations ineffective. Until this is done, both Boko Haram and ISWAP would continue to exploit and thrive on local grievances. The approaches toward the elimination of Boko Haram and ISWAP's influence operations must prioritise victims and include them as critical partners in the governance efforts intended at improving their conditions. This would no doubt go a long way in drawing them close to the side of the state, which has the primary responsibility of ensuring that they are safe and secure.

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